

RT. A Journal on Research Policy & Evaluation **1** (2013)
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Editorial

Research evaluation and research policy are key activities for scientists: they dramatically shape the contemporary landscape of science. Governments and funding bodies need evaluation to inform their decisions. Research institutions and universities plan recruitment and research activities in order to gain scientific reputation, more and more often seen as a *high* position in global and national rankings. Analogously scientific journals advertise their quality through bibliometric indicators and journal rankings. As a result, research evaluation, the building of bibliographic tools and data-bases, and the construction of bibliometric indicators are becoming a big business. Communities of practitioners, professionals and lobbyists are flourishing around such activities and also the number of scholars contributing to the fields of library and information science and scientometrics is rapidly growing.

In these fields, as in the multidisciplinary community focusing on research evaluation, the autonomy of science and the freedom of scholars is continuously challenged by business interests and policy pressure. The first line of defense against these external pressures is *reproducibility*, one of the key pillar of modern science. In scientometrics the reproducibility of bibliometric results requires, for example, that elementary data are made available and procedures and techniques are properly documented and fully described. Quite often, some if not all of these conditions are not satisfied because data diffusion is constrained by license agreements and techniques and procedures are proprietary or not fully disclosed. Nevertheless, it may well happen that these techniques, along with the results of not reproducible analyses, are used by policy makers, at all levels, to ground and justify their decisions. In such a situation, scientists, scholars and researchers should do their best to ensure that research evaluation relies on a sound approach. For this the availability of places open to a free, scientific discussion about research policy and evaluation has become vital for every scientific community. Moreover, such places should warrant a plurality of approaches and the possibility to challenge mainstream thinking whenever necessary because all the problems related with scientometrics and research evaluation are intimately linked with the progress and autonomy of science.

RT. A Journal on Research Policy and Evaluation aims to offer scholars such a place of discussion: open, scientifically robust, ethically compliant.

RT draws from the experience of www.roars.it (Return on Academic ReSearch), a collective blog in Italian, dedicated to the monitoring and critical examination of policy measures and trends in higher education and scientific research. In eighteen months *Roars* had more than 3,5 million of contacts, publishing more than 1.100 articles, many of which containing scholarly analysis, and showed a

growing influence on Italian academic communities. The mission of *Roars* is to react promptly to current news and debates, providing information and analyses that, in order to be timely, do not undergo all the steps of scientific peer-review. We believe that it is time to provide also durable scientific contributions through a new discussion environment offered to the multifaceted scientific community that consider research and critical thinking on scientometrics and research policies as one of its professional duties.

RT addresses not only bibliometricians, scientometricians and research policy scholars, but academicians from all fields of natural, social and human sciences, soliciting their scholarly contributions regarding research policy and evaluation.

The issues *RT* will address are the following:

1. research and teaching evaluation methods and practices;
2. the use and extension of quantitative indicators for the study of both research and higher education systems;
3. policy issues concerning higher education institutions, including the perspective evaluation of ongoing reforms and the retrospective assessment of past ones;
4. case studies, including historical ones, of reforms of specific research or higher education institutions, or systems thereof;
5. theoretical and empirical studies regarding ethical issues in science, including data access and retention, selective publication of results, fraud and plagiarism, and experimentation on humans and animals;
6. case studies and comparative analysis of legal aspects, law-making and design of laws regarding research evaluation and policy;
7. empirical studies, also from a historical perspective, regarding the influence of science and technology on society, especially of science and technology policy and institutions.

RT is a peer-reviewed open access academic journal, compliant with the COPE code of conduct. Contributions will be published as soon as they have successfully passed the review process.

I wish to thank everyone who has helped us to launch the journal: the board of editors, the editorial committee, our first authors and reviewers and the University of Milan publishing the journal. Last but not least, my thanks go to our present and future readers.

Alberto Baccini

Editor-in-Chief